

Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan Visits Common Ground Fair, Meets with USDA Leaders as Part of her Visit to Maine

By State Director Virginia Manuel



Gathering with USDA Leaders at the Common Ground Fair: USDA Rural Development State Director Virginia Manuel; Maine Congresswoman Chellie Pingree; USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan (holding vegetables from State Office People's Garden); USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist Juan Hernandez; USDA Farm Service State Executive Director Don Todd III; and USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service Director Gary Keough

September 23, 2012- Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan visited the Common Ground Fair on Sunday as a part of her visit to Maine. While at the Fair, the Deputy Secretary met with Leaders from four USDA Agencies (above) as well as numerous Maine organic farmers and gardeners.

During her Keynote Address at the Fair, Merrigan discussed organic farming as well as the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative, which is part of an important movement to connect consumers with the Farmers who grow their food. Through this initiative, USDA integrates programs and policies that stimulate food- and agriculturally-based community economic development; fosters new opportunities for farmers and ranchers; promotes locally and regionally produced and processed foods; cultivates healthy



Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan addresses a crowd during her keynote address. Standing next to Merrigan is Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association Executive Director Russell Libby

eating habits and educated, empowered consumers; expands access to affordable fresh and local food; and demonstrates the connection between food, agriculture, community and the environment. *Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food* also leads a national conversation about food and agriculture to strengthen the connection between consumers and farmers.

An interactive view of USDA programs that support local and regional foods is available at the [Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Compass](#). [The KYF Compass](#) is a digital guide to USDA resources related to local and regional food systems. The Compass consists of an [interactive U.S. map](#) USDA-supported local and regional food projects and an [accompanying narrative](#) documenting the results of this work through case studies, photos and video content.

The 2012 Common Ground Fair had the highest attendance in the Fair's 35-year history, with an estimated 59,000 people attending over the three days and 600 farms and businesses participating. The Fair is organized by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association.

While visiting Maine, Deputy Secretary Merrigan and Congresswoman Chellie Pingree also visited Rieche Elementary School in Portland's West End on September 24 to tour the school garden, visit the cafeteria, and learn about Reiche's farm-to-school program.

